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## Sikkema Gives Environmental Issues High Priority in GOP Caucus

From land use to recycling and clean water to stopping outof-state waste, Senate Majority Leader puts protecting Michigan's resources front and center of public debate

LANSING – After only a month on the job, Republicans in the Michigan Senate have made protecting Michigan's natural resources and addressing important environmental issues key parts of their legislative agenda.

Lead by Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, a recognized leader in protecting the environment, Senate Republicans have made bold steps on environmental issues and have showed they are serious about enacting legislation to preserve Michigan's natural resource legacy for generations to come.

"Environmental stewardship is not a partisan issue; it's something all of us have an obligation to work for," Sikkema, R-Wyoming, said. "Michigan is a treasure-trove of resplendent natural resources every bit deserving of our attention and protection."

Sikkema said the latest example of the high priority environmental concerns hold in the Republican caucus was the announcement he made today with House Speaker Rick Johnson, R-LeRoy, and Governor Jennifer Granholm on the appointment of a bipartisan council to study land use and development issues in Michigan.

Sikkema realized the importance of creating such a council last year when the Great

Lakes Conservation Task Force, of which he was chairman, found that the quality of Michigan's Great Lakes was strongly impacted by activities that occur on land.

"If we are to be good stewards of our Great Lakes, we need to be good stewards of our land," Sikkema said. "A modest five percent increase in Michigan's population will result in a 20 percent increase in land use. That means added pressure on the environment from runoff, urban sprawl, increased solid waste production and the need for more sewer capacity. Those are all reasons why we need to take a comprehensive look at land use and development issues now."

But land use is not the only item on the Senate's environmental agenda. Last month, Sikkema announced the formation of a task force to examine what changes are needed to improve and update Michigan's 26-year-old bottle deposit law.

The task force, chaired by Sen. Cameron Brown, R-Fawn River Township, will take an in-depth look at the bottle deposit law and make recommendations on what additional containers should be covered by it. Sikkema also said the task force will consider ways to promote and increase other forms of recycling in Michigan.

"Michigan is one of the worst states when it comes to amount of materials that are regularly recycled," Sikkema said. "Most people agree that more beverage containers need a return deposit, but I want to make sure Michigan moves forward on other kinds of recycling."

Sikkema also has asked Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck, chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs, to continue implementing the numerous recommendations made by the Great Lakes Conservation Task Force, starting with legislation to protect Michigan's freshwater aquifers from overuse and depletion.

Already, recommendations from that Senate task force have been signed into law. Sikkema sponsored the law that fights the introduction of aquatic nuisance species, like the Zebra Mussel, from ballast water discharged by commercial ships, a major source of contamination in the Great Lakes. And last November, Michigan voters approved a \$1 billion bond proposal to pay for sewer improvement. That proposal, another Great Lakes Conservation Task Force recommendation, provides financing for local communities to improve and rebuild antiquated sewer systems. The task force found that raw sewage is the

number-one cause of water pollution in and around the Great Lakes.

"These laws were introduced and enacted by Republicans who are concerned about their environment," Sikkema said. "I don't think there is any question that environmental issues take a high priority in the Senate Republican Caucus."

One of the longest-serving lawmakers in Lansing, Sikkema is considered the Legislature's top environmental leader. Sikkema headed up the West Michigan Environmental Council for three years before being elected to the House of Representatives in 1986.

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